

MEDIA REPORT

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PRODUCT REVIEW
By Cliff Edwards

A Media Player with Star Potential

MobiNote's DVX-Pod 7010 is an elegant portable device with a great screen, but its handling of video, audio, and photos is sometimes clumsy

EDITOR'S REVIEW ★★★★★ (Readers' Reviews below)



THE GOOD Massive screen is a showstopper

THE BAD Battery life, lacks built-in speakers, rips video only in real time

THE BOTTOM LINE A great, reasonably priced alternative to portable DVD players

The first thing you notice about MobiNote's \$699 DVX-Pod 7010 is its incredible elegance. When handling the portable media player (PMP), you feel as though you're living in the lap of luxury. Resembling an iPod on steroids, the 7010 sports a 6.5-inch low-temperature, polysilicon wide screen surrounded by a white plastic finish with silver buttons on top.

With its 20-gigabyte hard drive and audio-video in and out ports, the device can either record 30 movies encoded in the MPEG-4 format, rip 5,000 songs, or store 20,000 high-quality digital pictures, according to its Taiwanese makers. And all that power comes housed in a machine weighing just 1.5 lb. without the included stand.

ODD AMALGAM OF FEATURES. The 7010 gets really close to what a PMP should be, but it's still a work in progress. Billed as the next step in portable entertainment, PMPs have taken a lot of knocks in the past year because of their relatively limited capabilities. The all-in-one devices are meant to play movies and music and display photos -- although most consumers buy them primarily to watch videos.

Devices from Samsung, Creative ([CREAF](#)), and iRiver that use Microsoft ([MSFT](#)) Windows software force you to go through clunky downloads from the PC. And the best of the category, Archos Technology's AV series, suffers from its small (3.5-inch) liquid crystal display screen.

MobiNote set out to build a better mousetrap with the 7010 but ended up with an odd amalgam of features that put it firmly in the middle of the pack. The 7010 remains tied to the PC to accomplish even common functions such as renaming a file. On the other hand, it emulates Archos in its ability to record audio and video directly to the device.

The 7010 records in many of the most popular video encoding formats, including Windows Media 9, Apple's QuickTime 6, and DivX versions 3.11, 4, and 5. With an amazing 720-by-480-pixel resolution on its screen, it can reach DVD-quality resolutions when used with the newer DivX codec and QuickTime but is stuck with a lower quality, yet still decent, 352-by-288-pixel resolution with Windows.

STUMPED USER. The 7010's best feature: Its ability to encode on the fly directly from TV or DVDs via a video cable. But the 7010's less consumer-friendly features are glaring when you actually try to record a show. The device's separate categories -- one for video and one called PVR for TV and DVD recordings -- make it a little confusing to use. Then, oddly, you have to press the "scroll wheel/push-select function" button twice to begin recording. After reconciling myself with that, I could tell the machine was recording *Good Morning America* when a counter appeared in the bottom right corner and a recording sign appeared in the upper left.

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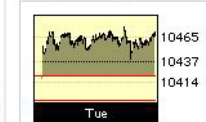
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The personal video recorder function also fell short of features available on other devices, including RCA's Lyra 2840 and the Archos AV420. Both have what's called an S-Video connector for higher quality recording, which the 7010 lacks. The Archos device also stands out for its ability to schedule recordings. With the 7010, rescheduling is manual, and you'll have to settle for a timer that works only in increments of 30 minutes, up to 4 hours.

Not for lack of trying, I also couldn't figure out how to rename files I recorded. Rival products offer simple steps and built-in electronic keyboards, but the 7010 stumped me when I tried to rename the numbered files assigned to my recordings. The short user manual provided no help, and neither did the support function on MobiNote's Web site, from which you must order the device. For now, it looks as though the only way to rename a file is to plug the unit into a PC, view the files, and change the name on the PC screen.

SCREEN SHINES. For DivX users, the 7010 coolly handled downloads of video trailers of the upcoming *Batman Begins* and *Fantastic Four* movies from the DivX Web site, thanks to its USB 2.0 connection that zips data in minutes instead of hours. With other videos I recorded, the 7010 never really makes complete use of its large screen because it records in the native format of the source material and doesn't include software to adjust the screen size, as some TVs do.

For music, the 7010 will transfer from PCs and Macs only unprotected Windows Media and MP3 formats. People who have recorded their music collections in other formats, including AAC (Advanced Audio Codec), Apple's ([AAPL](#)) proprietary flavor of AAC, and ATRAC (Adaptive Transform Acoustic Coding) are out of luck. When I tried several times to transfer a compilation CD encoded with Microsoft's digital-rights-management scheme, the device locked up and needed resetting. But when I moved MP3 files from an iMac to the device, it worked just fine. When I used a pair of Bose TriPort headphones, the music sounded great, too.

The 7010's screen really shines with pictures. In regard to digital files, the level of detail is nothing short of stunning, and the slide-show function makes it a great photo viewer that can sit on the desk and leaf through your album in 3-, 5-, or 10-second increments.

The 7010 is a good first effort by MobiNote to address a market likely to take off worldwide in a few years, particularly if these devices become Web-enabled. The manufacturer could address the device's few flaws in software updates to make it easier to use for the masses -- instead of just for gear-heads. Then, this sleeper could become a serious rival to its look-alike, the iPod.

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